

Khiva

Uzbeg & Turcoman in the Desert Khanate

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ON the banks of the river Amu-Daria, or Oxus, where it takes a bend north-west towards the Sea of Aral, the Khanate of Khiva, 200 miles long and 25 miles broad at most, is situated. Khiva proper, however, stands on the left bank, the right being merely pasture ground and uncultivated lands, where the irrigation that benefits the districts on the opposite shore is lacking.

In the Middle Ages Khiva, or Kharezm as its name was then, was celebrated throughout the East for its culture, and had a population one-third greater than at present. From the rule of the Tahirs, who occupied the throne (through a foreign dynasty) up to the end of the ninth century, and who often put personal gratification before the country's welfare, through the still worse domination of the Seuljuks, to the reign of the Khivan princes, the whole land sank deplorably, until continuous wars brought a climax of devastation.

Mongolian hordes laid it waste with fire and sword, almost obliterating the name of Khiva from the list of Turcoman dominions; and the restless, warlike conditions begun by the Changaz were continued by their descendants and representatives, the Uzbegs, down to quite recent times, practically without intermission.

These prolonged wars were either extraneous, with powerful Bokhara,

too strong a country for Khiva to cope with, or were the result of recurring civil strife, the natural effect of a cultured population being surrounded by wild nomadic tribes. Cattle-raiding and simple plunder grew to the destruction of whole districts. During the last three centuries Khiva has suffered thus from Kalmuks, Cossacks, Kara-Kalpaks, Tomutes, and Uzbegs, each nomadic race having successively captured the throne, and only since the beginning of the twentieth century has the Uzbeg dynasty maintained unbroken rule. Through the repulse of a Russian attack, and the subjugation of the Turcomans, the princes of this dynasty, of the tribe of Kungrat, won the respect of Persia and gained political eminence and independence for the Khanate.

The Khivan Uzbegs of to-day, a race crossed with modern Turanian elements,



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GRATEFUL SWEETNESS AMID THE DESERT DUST OF KHIVA

In a land where much of the soil is sandy and arid, the vender of sweets must be counted among the benefactors of the natives, who find his wares useful to soothe and satisfy their dusty throats. Seated tailor fashion on a cloth-covered board, he awaits the advent of some sturdy nomad of the plains to cry his toothsome goods and carve with sticky knife his lumps of sugared succulence

may be distinguished by their physique from any other Central Asiatics; their complexions are extremely white, and the men are large-boned, sinewy, heavy of gait, and with drowsy-looking eyes. Their dress is uncouth—an unshapely fur cap, a sort of padded dressing-gown, and immense boots with sole and upper leathers in one piece.

Yet, despite his lumbering walk and apparent solidity, his sleepy eyes and general air of laziness, I cannot call the Uzbek a lazy fellow. Let us stroll, in imagination, into a "havli" or farmyard; we shall note that the luxuriance of the sumach and the dwarf-bean is not altogether due to nature. Summer and winter, these Uzbek men with their primitive spades worked to lead the fertilising waters of the Amu-Daria through artificial channels to the scene; and the general run of land-owners drive the spade the year round.

Slaves we may see at the plough—a mere pole studded with teeth—or herdsmen driving their master's sheep and camels to pasture; but only the rich in Khiva can afford the luxury of slaves.

We shall see, most likely, the old paterfamilias seated beneath his spreading elms, and the farmyard beadle keeping order and also playing with the children. From these it was that most of my knowledge of Uzbek life and character came. A man of possibly sixty years of age, wonderfully tranquil, slow of speech, frugal of words; a man of high honour to all seeming, whose every remark will probably convey some Uzbek moral or point of native philosophy in consonance with his age and dignity—there you have a picture of a staid Khivan Uzbek, without one sign of any recognition of the great world outside. Unmistakably a man of Central Asia, and of no

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other place in the inhabited globe. Tea, steaming hot and sugarless, will be brought, and during conversation you must drink many cups of it; nor should you cool it by blowing—it is etiquette to shake it instead, in Khiva; fruit also will be served, and a heavy consumption of everything proffered will be highly approved by your host. Children will be there to complete the picture, clambering on knees and playing just as children do all the world over, old-fashioned youngsters with large, melon-shaped caps and curious black eyes. How they stare at a stranger! And if, as in my case, the stranger happens to be a dervish, how they will play with the beads of the rosary when confidential relations are established!

And the ladies? They will be there, too, white as the women of Swabia, with almond-shaped eyes; at first, peeping timidly, then boldly emerging from hiding to speak to the stranger. When he replies in passably good Uzbek speech, wonder reaches its height; and then tongues are loosened, and questions—some of them most embarrassing—will prove them true daughters of Eve.

For centuries Khiva has been noted for its music and song, its poetry and troubadours; the best singers, violin and guitar players, known at Constantinople, Ispahan, Lahore, and the ancient Ferganas (where they acquired princely favour and corresponding pay, and still do) were, and are, Khivans. An old adage prettily says, "The



TURBANED RIDER OF THE DESERT AND HIS WIRY STEED

Wide wastes of sand cover a large part of the State of Khiva, and in consequence, the population has taken to horseback rather than to walking. The type of horse used is of a wiry desert breed and capable of sustaining both the rider and his baggage, as seen above, for considerable distances over the boulder-strewn plains. Both horses and horsemen are essentially nomadic

Photo, Prince Burdukoff



TERPSICHOREAN POSE OF A DARK-SKINNED DANCING-BOY FROM KHIVA

Dancing, music, and poetry, all of a nature somewhat uncouth to Western ideas and breathing the spirit of their wild landscapes, are almost the sole recreations of the Khivans. Many a dance in a Russian ballet has its origin in these wide plains ridden by the grim Tartar and dour Mongol, and the steps and gestures of the native dancers are correspondingly full of a fierce agility

Photo, Prince Burdukoff



WOMAN OF THE WANDERING KIRGHIZ, WHO ROAM KHIVA'S PLAINS

Also found in the Khanate are the Kirghiz, a nomad people of the steppes, who wander over the wild centre of Asia, between Siberia and the Caspian. They are inseparable from their horses, whom they claim to resemble, especially in regard to their high cheek-bones. Their staple food is milk, for they despise agriculture, the Kirghiz word for farmer and poor man being the same

Photo, Miss E. R. Christie



WHEN THE MUEZZIN CALLS FROM THE TALL MINARET

Mahomedanism is deep-seated in south and western Asia. Here, in a sunny court without a mosque some pious mullahs, or Moslem teachers, are standing at prayers among the shoes of the faithful who are congregated within. The Muezzin, an official appointed for the purpose, sounds his call to prayer five times a day, and then every face turns to Mecca that Allah may hear the appeal

nightingale has been music-master through long years to the entire Khivan people"; and it is true that throughout Turkistan, among the Afghans in northern Persia, wherever, in short, the Turcoman language is known, good music is designated "Urgendsch"—that is to say, pertaining to Khiva.

Just as in Italy the traveller may hear excellent music in unexpected and undistinguished quarters, so in Khiva he would be quite likely to hear charming song and instrumental music where he might least anticipate it. No less general is the taste for recitation and poetry, in which the women usually excel; and if the lyrical compositions show little trace of originality, it is remarkable to find in such a barbarous land the muses cultivated at all.

Some of the proverbs I learnt when in Khiva are of interest, and as the proverbs of a people are indicative of their mode of thought a few may be suitably quoted here. It will be seen

that some of them have an echo in Western languages:—

When you go to law against the emperor, God himself should be your judge.

You may praise the Russian a thousand times, but his eyes will still be blue (the reverse of handsome, according to Uzbeg ideas).

He who fears the sparrow will never sow millet.

The spoken word cannot again be swallowed.

A living mouse is better than a dead lion.

When you die, even your tomb shall be comfortable.

Time does not bow to you; you must bow to time.

When the parson visits you, don't be overjoyed; he will soon begin to beg.

Were the hand to give all that the tongue promises, we should soon have no beggars; everybody would be a prince.

In the midst of a prosaic life, pictures of the many-coloured, bizarre surroundings of my Khivan days often float into my mind. I see the small-ware man of the bazaar displaying his Russian rattans, English fancy goods, bright-hued cloths; I note his inexpressible

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tranquillity as a Turcoman woman from the steppe comes near. I see the armourer trying his blades by running the edge across his nail. I see the quack doctor with his bags and boxes and many-tinted vessels containing the drugs and chemicals of his trade—never forgetting the inevitable opium paste. Unhappy the patient who applies to him for cure. He will prove the wisdom of the Uzbek reasoning, "What can the doctor's art avail to one whose death the Almighty has decreed?"

I see the bookstall and its proprietor, who will sell you a book, bind, transcribe, and even publish a book for you—a veritable man of letters. What would I not give to spirit away to Europe one of these bookstalls, with its treasures of Uzbek poetry, folklore, historical tracts, and other priceless tawny-coloured papers!

Other pictures recalled by memory are not less delightful. The gossiping groups, teacup in hand, watching perhaps a duel between a pair of furiously-butting rams. Blows are

counted, and bets are made as to the winner of the fray; but Uzbek rams are remarkably thick-pated, and forty or fifty attacks may occur before the finish. And amid all these scenes there is certain to be one group of improvisadores and story-tellers, young and old listening with rapt attention to tales of bygone heroes and their exploits or legends from mystic lore.

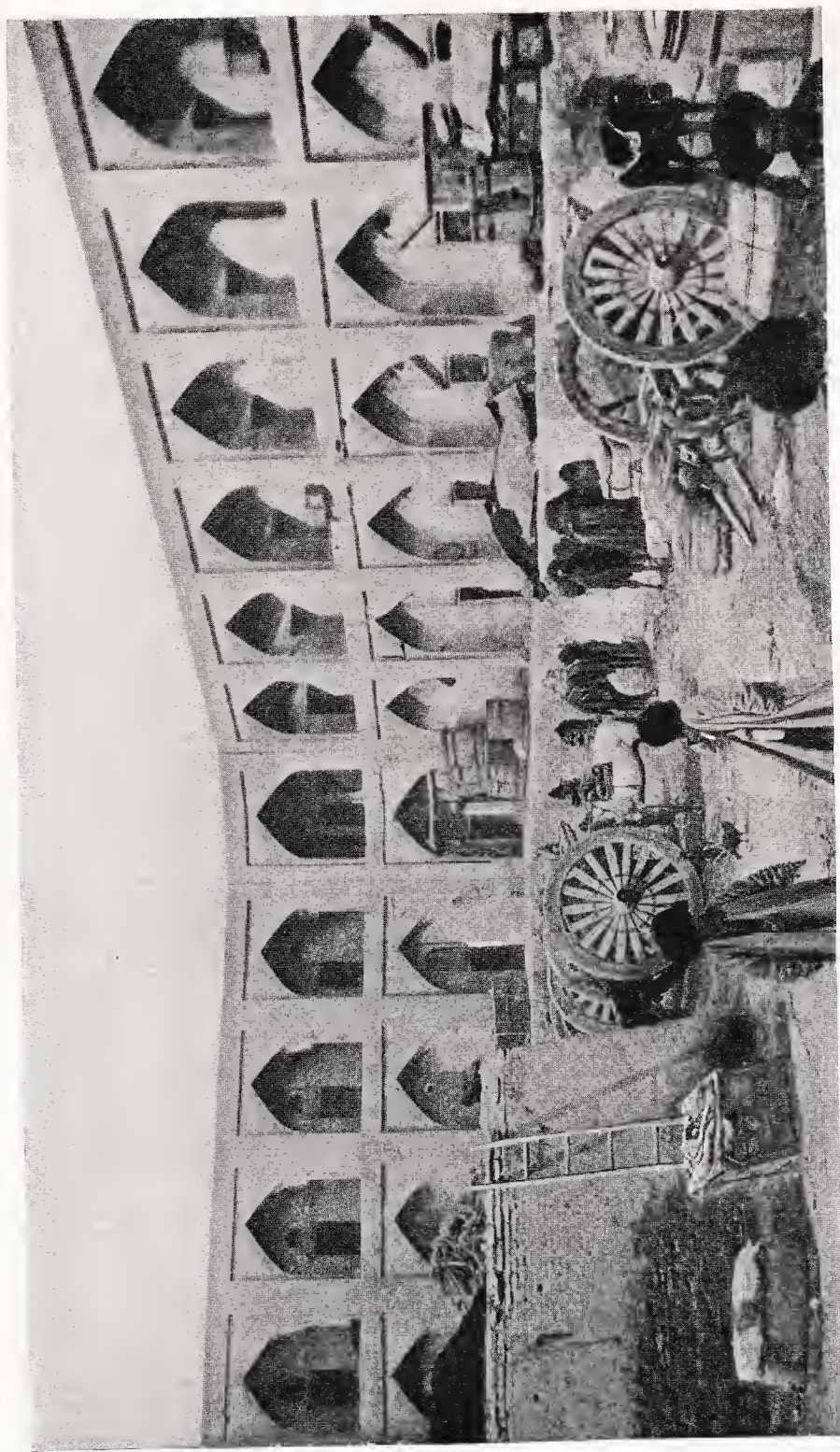
In spring, either on the pasture grounds or on the sandy steppes, comes the Noruz feast, a relic of ancient Parsee culture, when the people, in gala dress, go to feed the sacred flame. Singing and dancing, the giving of presents, the adorning of the head with rose-garlands, form a part of the celebration, and the Khivan youth in their hundreds bear tamarisk branches to the sacred fire.

Amusements on the steppe, at wedding and other festivities, consist chiefly in running for prizes, or in an equestrian game in which some young girl plays the principal part. On a wild, unsaddled horse she careers madly across the sand,



BLACKSMITH OF THE TAJIKS AT HIS RAMSHACKLE FORGE

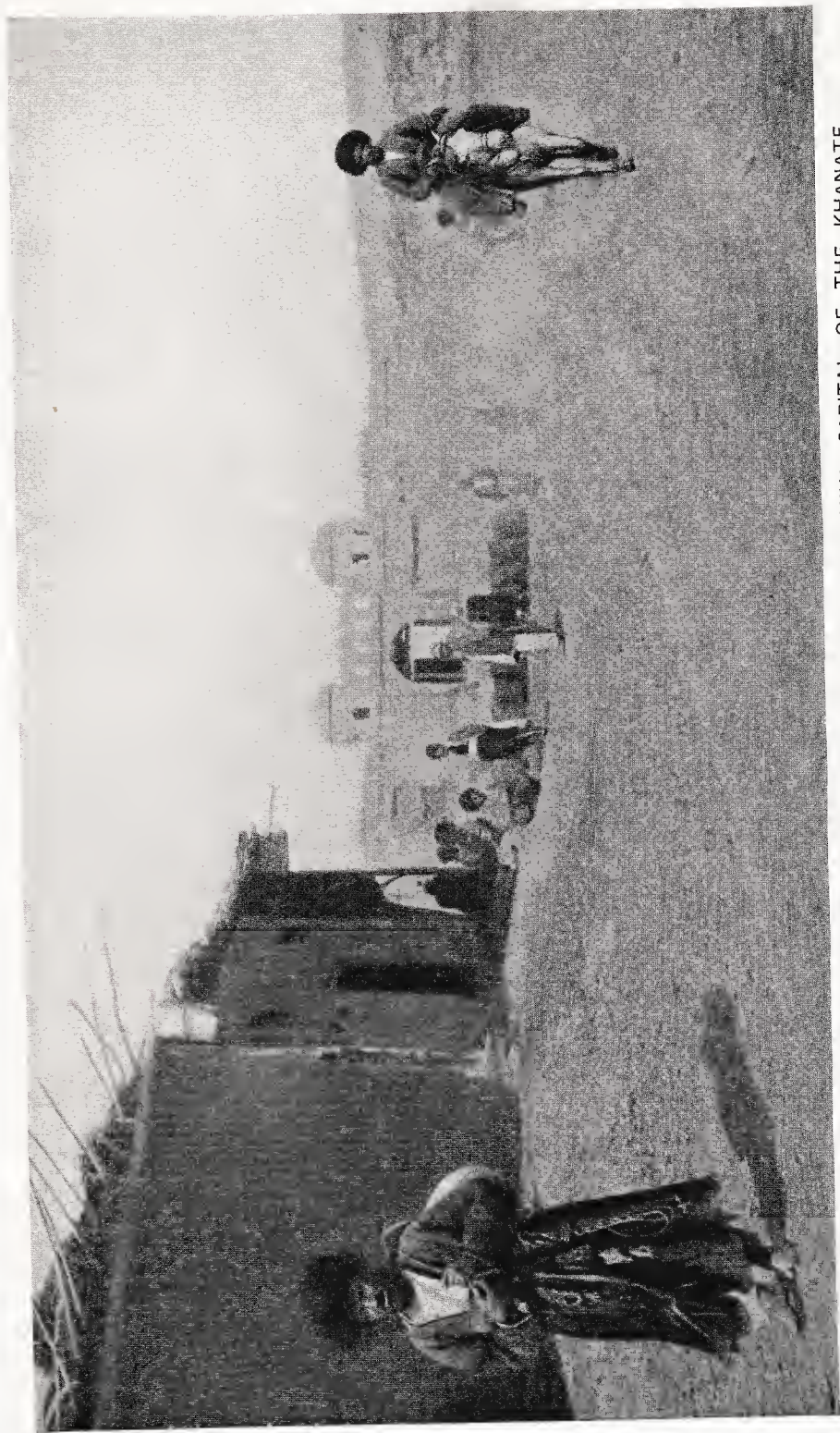
Khiva has been in the hands of various races from time to time, having formed part of the Bactrian, Persian, Turkish, Mongol and Russian Empires. Consequently, a variety of racial stocks go to the making of its people, among them being the round-headed Iranian type known as Tajiks. Here, one has set up a smithy for local repairs. He has a small anvil between his knees



CARTS AND CAMELS IN THE FOUR-SQUARE COURT OF A KHIVAN CARAVANSERAI AT URGENJ

Situated on a canal which receives its water from a tributary of the great Amu-Daria river, known anciently as the Oxus, this town, which has suffered much from the devastation of war, was formerly the capital of the Khanate. It once contained fifteen mosques and three hundred shops, while the houses of Khiva's chief merchants and the centre of manufacturing activity were found there. Urgenj has since become a place of broken clay walls and dusty ruins, though this caravanserai, somewhat resembling that shown on page 2905, still survives for the lodging of man and beast.

Photo, Miss E. R. Christie



DRAB DWELLINGS WITHIN THE CRENELLATED CLAY WALLS OF KHIVA, CAPITAL OF THE KHANATE

Architecture is not very carefully studied in this war-worn town, the houses being constructed, for the most part, of clay, brushwood, and poles of poplar. The appearance of these habitations, as can be seen above, is somewhat sketchy and even decrepit, while the streets are, as a whole, narrow and winding, and extraordinarily unclean. A European visitor has described the general appearance of the place as resembling "an irregular heap of earthen clods," Yet it makes some attempt to acquire a metropolitan air with its two palaces and seventeen mosques

Photo, Miss E. R. Christie



CONSTANT CIRCUMAMBULATION TO WATER THE SANDY SOIL

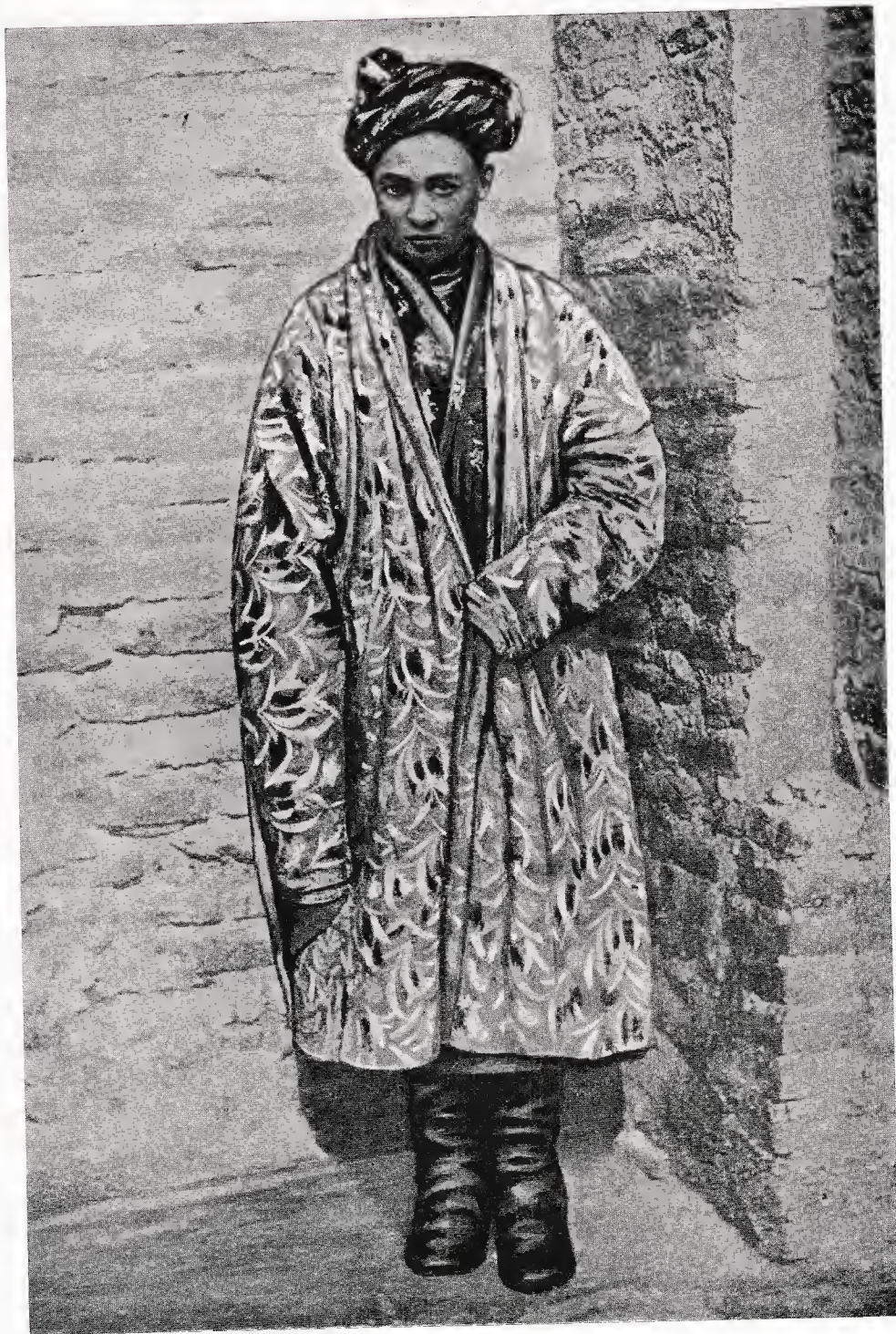
Irrigation is one of the few amenities of civilization that the Khivans really enjoy. There is a network of canals fed from the Amu-Daria which supplies the ditches that surround most of the fields. The soil is sandy and often saline, yet good crops result. Thus, this patient horse, so clumsily harnessed, is working for both his own and his master's welfare

Photo, Miss E. R. Christie

carrying in her arms a lamb, and armed with a stout whip, with which she chastises the young men whose object it is to snatch the little animal from her arms. This is no easy task, as I know from experience, having often joined in the contest; many a hot-blooded enthusiast gets honourable scars as evidence of his sporting endeavours, and the whole affair is wildly exciting.

"To horse, to horse!" is a standing cry of the Uzbeks. Well-to-do people almost exist on horseback, alighting only for the formalities of prayer, and to proclaim thus their affinity with the dust. So much, then, for a general impression

of Uzbek life. In different localities certain variations will, of course, be found. Khiva, the metropolis, has a population of about 12,000, and is considered the centre of learning and intelligence, the existence of a college lending some support to this claim, although it is almost the poorest of Central Asian cities. Other towns worth mention are Urgenj (Urgench), having commercial relations with Russia; Gurlen, noted for its fine melons, its excellent bread, and its musicians; Kungrad, inhabited by Kara-Kalpaks and Turcomans, where meat, butter, and cream are at their cheapest; and



LONG-SLEEVED OFFICIAL OF KHIVA'S SOVIET GOVERNMENT

Khiva has suffered during hundreds of years, not only from intermittent invasion and devastation, but also from a cruel and relentless spirit in its government. The rule of the Khans was autocratic and brutal. A form of republican administration has been set up since the Great War, but it is doubtful if the officials who serve it will trust to other and gentler methods than those of yore

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PASSING PUFFS

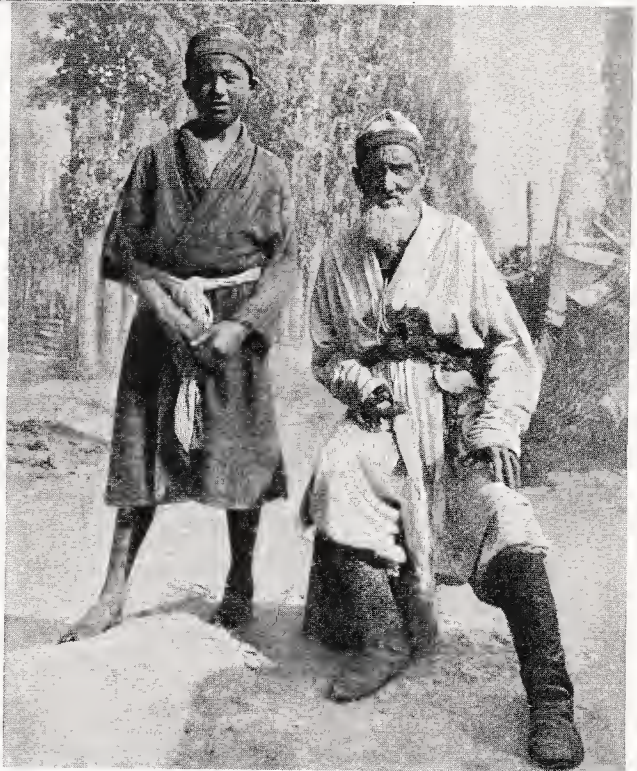
It is unnecessary to be cumbered with smoking materials in Khiva, for this peripatetic tobacconist supplies one's needs

Chadscha-Ili, famous for the genealogical pride of its people, who claim direct descent from the Prophet. It is regarded as a great honour to secure a bride from this town. There are other, smaller towns, most of which are mere collections of tents within gardens.

Over this picture of Khivan life one dark shadow must unhappily be cast. The government and political conditions are characterised by the utmost despotism, and the traveller is horrified by crimes which hardly had any parallel even in the blackest period of the Middle Ages. Captive women bound to horses' tails and dragged thus for

hours; old men deprived of sight; maiming, mutilation, throwing from towers upon spikes or sharp stones, flaying alive—all these forms of torture are common, ordained by State command without scruple or remorse.

Despots everywhere are afraid of their own shadows; yet in Khiva the clutch of this iron hand does not interfere with a strong sense of loyalty and respect for the sovereign. Under a sound government, Uzbek life in Khiva might once more be tranquil, happy, and free from the hand of the oppressor.



PATRIARCH OF THE SARTS AND HIS SON

Unlike Uzbek or Turcoman, the Sart is a stock-breeder and agriculturist, fond of a fixed abode. Of a round-headed Turkic stock, for the most part Moslemised, he forms the most stable part of Khiva's otherwise nomadic population